

AT Advisory Council

Minutes for the April 26, 2006 meeting

Members Present:

Kevin Ammons, consumer; **Betsy Gruba**, consumer; **Noah Hershkowitz**, consumer; **John Nousaine**, ILC representative; **Brent Odell**, DPI representative; **Cleo Eliason**, DVR representative; **Meg Steimle**, parent representative; and **Jackie Wells**, consumer.

Members Not Present:

Bill Ager, consumer

Staff and Others Present:

Holly Laux O'Higgins, WisTech Director; **Ralph Pelkey**, WisTech; **Sharon Vivian**, CART accommodations provider; **David Hyde**, Chairperson Council on Blindness; **Karen Majkrzak**, Director, Council for the Blind and Visually Impaired; **John Reiser**, Director, Office for Independence and Employment.

Location:

Council for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Madison

Review of minutes from January meeting

A motion to approve the minutes was made by Noah Hershkowitz, seconded by Meg Steimle. The vote to approve was unanimous.

Federal Funding of the Tech Act

Holly reviewed the difference between the Title I and Title III programs. The names Title I and Title III are holdovers from an earlier version of the Tech Act in which Title I denoted Tech Act programs such as device loan, demonstration and reutilization. Title III denoted the Alternative Financing Program (in Wisconsin, WisLoan). Titles I and III were rolled into the reauthorized version of the Tech Act. There is some discussion nationally regarding need for funding outside of the federal Tech Act allocation to fund former Title III (Alternative Financing) programs.

Holly O'Higgins reviewed funding for Tech Act programs for federal fiscal years 2005 (October 1, 2004 to September 30, 2005) and 2006 (October 1, 2005 to September 30, 2006). WisTech is currently spending the award for federal fiscal year 2005 and will begin spending the award for federal fiscal year 2006 after October 1. The award for federal fiscal year 2006 was increased by approximately \$19,044; the Council will discuss potential ways to use those dollars at the August meeting.

The Council voted unanimously (motion made by Betsy Gruba, seconded by Cleo Eliason) to send letters to the Wisconsin congressional delegation supporting a \$35 million appropriation of the Tech Act approved by the Senate. The sample letter will be revised by John Nousaine and faxed to delegates by Holly O'Higgins. The letter urges members of the Wisconsin delegation to contact their party lead and ask for support of the \$35 million appropriation for the Tech Act approved by the Senate.

Legislation Discussion

The council heard descriptions of and had discussion about two piece of proposed national legislation.

1. *HR 4994*. This federal legislation removed complex durable medical equipment from the competitive bid process required by the Medicare Modernization Act. Brent motioned to support this legislation by sending a letter to the Wisconsin delegation. Meg seconded the motion and the Council voted unanimously to approve the motion.
2. *AB 1142*. Joe Mielczarek from the Northcentral Technical College spoke with the Council about this state legislation. AB 1142 would remove the loopholes from current book access legislation that have allowed publishers to publish inaccessible textbooks. AB 1142 would make sure that students have a book in the proper format available to them within 15 days of starting school. Joe Mielczarek requested a letter of support from the Council.

Betsy Gruba motioned that the Council provide a letter of support for AB 1142. Jackie Wells seconded the motion and the Council voted unanimously to send a letter of support to Joe Mielczarek.

3. *David Hyde, Chairperson for the Governor-appointed Council on Blindness, spoke about two initiatives that the Council is addressing:*
 - a. Eliminating sales tax on AT used by people who are blind or visually impaired. The Council supports the tax issue but is concerned about that benefit only being available to a single disability group.

One method the Council on Blindness will use to address this issue is creating a definition of assistive technology. The Council on Blindness realizes that it does not speak for every person with disabilities in the state, and asked for input from the AT Council.

- b. Proposed changes in how services to people who are blind or visually impaired are organized in Wisconsin. In the state there are three offices that provide services to people who are blind: the Office for the Blind and Visually Impaired, the Department of Public Instructions/Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired, and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. The Council on Blindness is pursuing the merging of these offices. The AT Advisory Council took no action on this item.

Wisconsin Council on Blindness:

The Council heard a quick introduction and welcome to the facility from the new director of the Council for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Karen Majkrzak. She talked to the Council about the peer support groups for working-age visually impaired people and the Sharper Image Store, the new name for the Council store selling vision-related assistive technology.

Medicaid Infrastructure Grant: Training and Technical Assistance Project

Holly O'Higgins and Ralph Pelkey briefed the Council on the AT T&TA Project. The project, funded through the Medicaid Infrastructure Grant, will create a single online resource for regional and statewide AT information. The site will be maintained by the Stout Vocational Rehabilitation Institute and all content will be a collaborative effort with WisTech. The site will also have an associated toll-free number that will be included in all marketing materials developed for WisTech.

DHFS Updates

Board Member Recruitment:

The recruitment efforts have been postponed due to staff time availability. The recruitment efforts will be completed in time for the full Council to vote on new members at the August meeting. The new member(s) will attend the October meeting in Green Bay.

Review of WisTech Budget:

Holly O'Higgins and Ralph Pelkey talked about the current WisTech budget and the funding increase of \$19,044. The full Council will discuss strategies for allocating the additional funds for the 2006-2007 award year.

Review of Reporting Tool for Device Loan Centers:

Holly O'Higgins briefed the Council on the tool developed with the help of the materials from the national organization of AT programs. The tool was distributed to all ILCs for gathering information. This tool will be revised when the official tool is distributed by the Rehabilitation Services Administration.

Review of State Leadership Activities:

Holly O'Higgins and Ralph Pelkey briefed the Council on the activities of the DHFS staff.

General Discussion:

The Council requested that the term limits of members were listed in the minutes from the August meeting. The term limits are:

Bob White, 2 years/August 2007

Brent Odell, 2 years/August 2007

John Nousaine, 2 years/August 2007

Bill Ager, 2 years/August 2007

Kevin Ammons, 3 years/August 2008

Betsy Gruba, 3 years/August 2008

Noah Hershkowitz, 3 years/August 2008

Meg Steimle, 2 years/August 2007

Jackie Wells, 2 years/August 2007